

Opening Statement
Chairman Chris Smith
Somalia: Expanding Crisis in the Horn of Africa
House Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Human Rights and International Operations
June 29, 2006

Since the fall of the last government in Somalia in 1991, this nation has become synonymous with chaos. It is considered a classic failed state with no effective government and violence as its daily environment. Now an Islamist union containing elements of several jihadist groups, many with ties to al-Qaeda, has ousted the secular warlords in Mogadishu, raising even more troubling questions about the future of this state and its threat to the United States, its immediate neighbors and the world as a haven for terrorists.

Our purpose in convening today's hearing is to examine the situation in Somalia, review our options and devise a U.S. policy that will help neutralize the growing danger posed by an unstable Somalia.

According to a UN Security Council report, there are terrorist training bases in Somalia and terrorists who allegedly took part in the attacks on the USS Cole and the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The terrorist threat in Somalia is quite real, and the continuing violence endangers the already-fragile Horn of Africa.

Six people were killed only yesterday in renewed fighting just outside Somalia's capital. Over the past 15 years, many people have fled into an unsafe capital when the outlying areas were made even more dangerous. The constant violence and the growing incidence of piracy has exacerbated the existing humanitarian

crisis, which was the reason the United State reengaged in Somalia more than a decade ago.

The humanitarian pipeline into southern Somalia has been virtually shut down due to violence and piracy, leaving more than two million people in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The need to improve stocks of emergency drugs and supplies is critical at this point. Moreover, in a time of drought, especially in southern Somalia, supplies of water must be provided immediately in sufficient amounts. However, can the fighting and the piracy be stopped so that the needs of so many Somali people can be met?

Over the years, there have been 14 attempts to establish a government, but none of them succeeded – not even the most recent attempt, which created a transitional government that was inaugurated two years ago. Somalia's bloodthirsty warlords could only agree that none of them would be allowed to manage a coherent government. Despite the selection by 21 militias of fellow warlord, Ali Mohammed Ghedi, as Prime Minister, the other warlords refused to fully accept his authority and continued to make life a living hell for Somalians.

Earlier this year, the capital city of Mogadishu was rocked by the worst violence in a decade, as scores of people were killed and hundreds were injured during fierce fighting between rival militias.

A rudimentary system of Islamic courts was funded several years ago by a group of Somali businessmen, hoping to create at least some semblance of law and order. This group of Islamic courts established a union, and it is this group that spearheaded the effort that resulted in the overthrow of the lawless Somali warlords a few weeks ago.

Unfortunately, turning over power to this group is clearly not the answer. The international community and many in Somalia have

grave concerns about the Islamic Courts Union's seizure of power in Somalia. There are several reasons for this concern:

- The attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania are believed to have been planned and launched from Somalia, and individuals and groups responsible for those attacks are now in power.
- Sheik Hassan Dahir Aweys, the leader of the Council of Islamic courts, is considered a terrorist with possible ties to al-Qaeda.
- Several of the factions which make up the Islamic Courts Union embrace global jihad, desire to establish sharia law, and have declared their intent to make Somalia an Islamist state.
- The Union includes foreign fighters from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and other Arab states, and has been supported by Saudi Arabia and Yemen.
- Despite an international arms embargo, weapons are an easy commodity to buy in Mogadishu.
- Somali warlords and bandits have been reported to be operating in eastern Ethiopia and northern Kenya.
- Finally, the last government of Somalia launched an attack on Ethiopia to recover territory it claimed in the Ogaden region, and there is concern that a renewed effort to reclaim territory in Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti could be rekindled by an expansionist Islamist government.

The growing alarm over the violence in Somalia is contrasted with the relative peace and order in the northeastern area known as Somaliland. One must ask how it is that this area is able to establish effective governance while the other part of Somalia has not. This question raises issues that must be examined by our entire government in devising a new, more successful policy toward Somalia.

Our failure since 1991 to create a successful Somalia policy must not be continued. In October 1993, two American helicopters were shot down and 18 Army Rangers were killed in 17 hours of intense fighting in the Somali capital. The sight of American servicemen dragged through the streets of the capital seemed to diminish the national will to intervene in Somalia. Yet the expanding crisis in Somalia and its potentially disastrous impact on the Horn of Africa requires that we rethink our approach on these matters.

The creation of the International Somalia Contact Group seems to be a step in the right direction. The first meeting of the group – co-chaired by Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer – met on June 15th in New York and will meet again in Sweden on July 7th. I look forward to hearing from Assistant Secretary Frazer how this group might positively impact the crisis.

It is my hope that today's hearing will provide us with ideas that can be discussed and debated by the Administration and Congress with the objective of creating a new, more successful Somalia policy that will bring stability and peace to this country and its neighbors.